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ABSTRACT

This guide outlines the key elements of a full time equivalent (FTE) instructional support model, and provides suggestions for its effective implementation. Support teachers in the Instructional Support Team (IST) Program perform a variety of functions, including conducting instructional assessments, classroom observations, data collection, development of behavior management plans, and outreach with parents and other groups. Some schools, rather than appointing a full-time support teacher, have opted to designate existing staff to conduct the required activities. The FTE model requires strong administrative support from the principal to ensure that these activities are considered a priority. Each staff member performing part of the FTE functions must have sufficient and clearly designated time to carry out these functions, and each should be trained in all aspects of instructional support. Schools using the FTE model must determine how the IST process will be coordinated, with emphasis on accomplishing defined functions rather than on rigidly defined roles. Finally, schools need to consider methods to make other staff available to the FTEs when they are conducting instructional support activities. (ND)

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Key Elements of a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Model of IST

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KEY ELEMENTS OF A FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE) MODEL OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

The Pennsylvania Regulations and Standards for Special Education mandate that each elementary (K-6) school in the Commonwealth institute an Instructional Support Team (IST). The three required participants in this team are the student's classroom teacher, the school principal, and the support teacher. Most schools have met this requirement by establishing a full-time support teacher in each school of approximately 500 students. Some other schools have attempted to designate existing staff to conduct the required activities of a support teacher. Schools that opt for this arrangement must show that the combined time allocated for all designated staff members who fulfill the role of a support teacher is equivalent to a full-time support teacher.

This determination of the full-time equivalent (FTE) is stringently monitored because of the extensive duties of the support teacher. The support teacher provides instructional support to teachers under the direction of the principal in order to facilitate the screening of students suspected of being eligible for special education. Included in these duties are the following:

- Support teachers conduct instructional assessments in all academic areas where necessary in order to ascertain the student's instructional levels, the student's strengths and weaknesses, and interventions and teaching strategies that would be effective for that student.

- Support teachers conduct classroom observations, teacher consultations, parent interviews, reviews of student performance, and student interviews. These data enable the IST to identify the student's key areas of concern and appropriate student goals for the 30 day intervention period.

- Support teachers participate in all IST meetings and take an active role in helping to develop the student's action plan for the IST intervention period.

- Support teachers may also teach individual students who are identified to the IST for the purpose of developing and demonstrating effective classroom techniques. Support teachers may also model/demonstrate strategies for small group or whole classroom use. The support teacher, along with other team members, works with the student's classroom teacher(s) and other educational personnel so that they will assume the responsibilities for providing those instructional strategies found to be effective during the 30 day intervention period. This type of support may also be provided to family members who may be part of the intervention plan for the student.

- Support teachers also facilitate the monitoring and data collection activities related to the 30 day instructional intervention period.

- As a key member of the IST, support teachers may also, through inservice training and rapport building activities, help their school's staff understand and become part of the IST process. Orientations and overviews for parents, school board, and other community groups may also be part of a support teacher's role.

- Support teachers develop behavior management plans for determining specific occurrences of inappropriate and appropriate behavior, as well as for identifying methods for assisting teachers in increasing appropriate behavior for individual students

- Support teachers facilitate collaborative with regular and special educators in identifying and utilizing resources within and outside the district.

It should be noted that inappropriate functions of the support teacher include writing IEPs, preparing and/or presenting Notices of Recommended Assignment (NORAs), becoming a a permanent tutor or class teacher of a referred student, substituting for school personnel, serving as the principal's designee at IST meetings, evaluating and/or observing professional staff, becoming the school "materials maker" or "test giver," or providing enhancement services for gifted students. A further description of the role of the support teacher is provided in the IST Guidelines (PDE, 1994).

The FTE method of providing instructional support can work effectively only if these new support teacher duties supplant previous activities in each staff member's job description. In most cases, roles must be restructured to allow for these new functions. Schools that have tried to impose new functions on an existing full-time job have not been successful in meeting state requirements. Generally, practices in these schools do not resemble standards of effective instructional support as is typically evidenced in schools that have full-time support teachers.

Because of the difficulty in applying this model successfully, it is not the recommended approach for most schools. The FTE model should be considered only when there are job roles in a school that are capable of being restructured. The FTE model is especially appropriate if the school is undergoing job restructuring for reasons other than meeting the IST requirements, such as decreasing enrollments in special education or remedial programs, or the perceived need to add pupil service workers (e.g., school psychologists, guidance counselors).

If a school district decides that it will use an FTE model, the following suggestions provide guidance as to how a school can effectively implement this approach.

Administrative Support and Leadership

Implementation of the FTE model of instructional support is difficult because it requires individuals to perform new functions, adopt new roles, and continue with prior roles and responsibilities. Strong building-level support is needed to send a clear message that instructional support is a priority and to state clear expectations that the instructional support process will be implemented according to state requirements and standards of effective practice. In order to ensure the effectiveness of an FTE model, the principal needs to:

1. Make the time available for each FTE to participate (re-assign duties if necessary)
2. Be actively involved in the training and implementation
3. Provide a climate for collaboration
4. Empower the FTEs and other team members to design the process
5. Expect accountability
6. Schedule regular team maintenance meetings
7. Help the team explain to the building faculty how the FTE model works

Clearly Designated Time for IST

It is essential that each of the staff members who comprise the FTE has time to perform the functions of instructional support. "IST" time must be clearly designated for each of the FTEs. This usually means that each of the FTEs must be relieved of some previous responsibilities in order to "make room" for the new ones. Unless this job restructuring occurs, the instructional support process will not operate as designed in State Regulations and Standards. The time designated for IST is not merely the time spent in IST meetings, although this time is part of the commitment. More critically, it is the time required to meet individually with classroom teachers, and to conduct the activities described above in the student's classroom.

For example, in a rural school in south-central part of the state, the remedial specialist, the guidance counselor, and the school psychologist have been relieved of approximately one third of their other duties to form the FTE. This arrangement was accomplished in the following manner. The reading specialist replaced her previous student assessment with procedures that conform to the IST process. The guidance counselor completely eliminated the time-consuming activity of administering screening tests (e.g., the Slosson). The school

psychologist predicted accurately that the IST process would eliminate many unnecessary multi-disciplinary assessments, leaving ample time for teacher consultation.

Another school district in the central part of the state was able to blend the roles of support teacher and special education teacher by decreasing the rosters of each special education teacher and including all of the students with disabilities in the regular classroom. With this approach, special education-support teachers are in the regular classroom 100% of the time, alternately supporting students with disabilities and providing instructional support for other students.

Because of its size (1100 students), a large urban school designated both a primary (K-2) and an intermediate (3 & 4) FTE structure. Each FTE included three teachers. The primary FTE included a reading specialist, a basic skills teacher, and a program support teacher. The intermediate FTE included a special education resource room teacher, a math teacher, and another reading specialist. After identifying available staff, each FTE was assigned two periods (90 minutes) per day for IST.

Comprehensive Training for All FTEs

Each of the FTEs must be trained in all aspects of instructional support in order to become capable of performing all of the functions of the support teacher (see description of support teacher duties above). This commitment includes attendance at all designated training workshops (e.g., component overviews, Elementary Student Assistance Training, team training). Most critically, it also requires availability in the building when the IST Consultant is providing on-site demonstration and guided practice of the training components. At these times, all FTEs must be freed from other duties in order for observe and participate in these student-centered training activities.

Individuals who are designated as an FTE support teacher must have a clear understanding of the role of the support teacher. During training, the functions of the support teacher should be clearly explained, irrespective of the number of people who fulfill the role. This discernment helps the FTEs to view the role holistically. As the training progresses and the team's understanding of the IST process grows, the FTEs can decide how they will share the job responsibilities.

Roles and responsibilities

In schools that have a full-time support teacher, that person is usually the common point of entry for teachers identifying students for instructional support. Schools using the FTE process need to determine how the IST process will be coordinated. At one IST site, a "system manager" receives requests from

teachers and immediately assigns the request to one of three FTEs. Serving as a case manager, each FTE is responsible for seeing that the instructional support process is implemented for that student. However, it is important to understand that this is a flexible system in which the FTE can request that others perform some of these functions. For example, the FTE may ask the counselor to interview the child, the classroom teacher may be asked to interview the parent, or the school psychologist may be asked to observe the child. In some cases, the reading teacher may be asked to conduct classroom-based assessment or to review data already collected. The emphasis is on accomplishing relevant functions, rather than on rigidly defined roles or on pre-conceived professional boundaries. As the problem identification process proceeds, the case manager and requesting teacher enlist the help of additional people to be on the IST for that particular student.

Time for Collaboration

In addition to the time commitment of the FTEs, schools need to consider methods to make other staff available to the FTEs when they are conducting instructional support activities. At one IST school, substitute coverage is used one day a week to permit classroom teachers to participate in instructional support functions, including meeting with a parent or case manager, observing the student in another setting, or attending a team meeting. In addition, "grade team" meetings are held in lieu of faculty meetings. Within the grade team structure, teachers share information and concerns about students and assist each other with "first line" interventions. Requests for assistance from the IST are agreed upon and made by the grade team. Also, on occasion, each of the FTEs also provide class coverage for classroom teachers to participate in the instructional support process.

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